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DEPT FOR AF/S - ELIZABETH PELLETREAU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: MALAWI - POLITICAL PARTIES CLASH IN THE SOUTH

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Beginning with incidents last December, violence between supporters of former president Bakili Muluzi's United Democratic Front (UDF) and President Bingu Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has been increasing in Machinga, the home district of Muluzi. Early clashes resulted in only minor injuries, but in January protesters stoned a DPP deputy minister's official car forcing the cancellation of a rally. Events escalated on March 21, when police arrested UDF Member of Parliament Rev. Wilson Ndomondo, his wife, son, and 32 supporters after a prospective DPP parliamentary candidate was allegedly beaten. Days later, police arrested ten more UDF supporters prior to a Muluzi rally in Blantyre after they scuffled with DPP supporters. Muluzi responded, claiming the arrests were politically motivated, noting that only UDF partisans had been detained. Past elections in Malawi have generated little violence, but these confrontations - a full year prior to the election - combined with continuous public expressions of animosity between Muluzi and Mutharika, portend further clashes, particularly in the south. End Summary.

UDF Defends Muluzi's Home Turf

¶12. (U) In December last year, UDF supporters clashed with police in Machinga, the home district of former president Muluzi. The UDF members claimed the police had uprooted party flags on the road to a Presidential function in the district. In the clash, protesters threw stones at the police, injuring an officer and forcing police to respond with tear gas. A UDF spokesman claimed after the incident that it was actually DPP supporters who had removed the UDF flags. Seven UDF supporters were later arrested for the assault.

¶13. (U) In early January alleged UDF supporters in Machinga disrupted a political rally organized by Deputy Minister of Industry & Trade, Ellock Maotcha Banda. Banda is the MP for Machinga Central and was elected as an independent in 2004, defeating a UDF incumbent - former Minister of Labor Alice Suman. Banda was also one of the first MPs to join Mutharika's DPP in 2005. In the chaos, people smashed the deputy minister's official car injuring six people. A prospective DPP parliamentary candidate's car was also stoned by the crowd. In response to the attack, Banda was forced to postpone the planned DPP rally due to security concerns. The UDF was quick to distance itself from the incident, but police later arrested six UDF supporters as suspects.

¶14. (U) Banda successfully held his postponed rally in Machinga in mid-February but not without further incident. During the rally, alleged UDF supporters tried and failed to disrupt the gathering, by removing goal posts from a soccer field where a match was scheduled to end the rally. The police arrested nine people for the disruption.

UDF MP Arrested for Suspected Involvement

¶15. (SBU) On March 21 police arrested Hon. Rev. Wilson Ndomondo, a

UDF MP for Machinga Southeast, after Ndomondo addressed supporters during a UDF meeting. (Comment: Maotcha Banda is well known for chiding Rev. Ndomondo during sessions of parliament for remaining with the UDF. End Comment) Henderson Muleme, a prospective DPP parliamentary candidate, claimed Ndomondo and his UDF supporters smashed his vehicle and injured him so badly that he required hospitalization. A UDF spokesperson countered that UDF and DPP supporters had only traded insults on the way to separate rallies and that the DPP partisans convinced police to arrest Ndomondo. The UDF also claimed that the police had to bring Ndomondo to three police stations before finding one who would agree to detain him for fear of inciting more violence. Ndomondo's wife, son, and 32 other UDF supporters were also arrested when they went to the police station to check on Ndomondo's condition. Ndomondo and his UDF supporters have since been released on bail.

Clashes Spread to Blantyre

¶6. (U) On March 24 UDF and DPP supporters clashed again, this time in Blantyre, on the way to a Muluzi rally. UDF supporters allegedly stopped along the route to confront DPP supporters who had planted DPP flags along the roadside. The incident resulted in five people going to the hospital with injuries and the eventual arrest of 10 UDF supporters. The arrests prompted Muluzi to condemn the police for being politically influenced, citing that police had so far only arrested UDF partisans in the five clashes.

Early Incidents Indicate Potential for Violence in South

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Machinga is the heart of Muluzi's and the UDF's support base. Much as the president's home town of Thyolo is a "no go" area for the UDF, the violence shows that the UDF will defend its perceived area from DPP encroachment. With both Muluzi and

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Mutharika angling for support in the southern region to counter Malawi Congress Party candidate John Tembo's central region stronghold, tensions in the south are unlikely to go away. While past elections have generated little violence in Malawi, incidents have never begun this early. As Muluzi continues to publicly state his main goal is to remove Mutharika from office, the level of animosity between both party leaders and their supporters is bound to intensify as the May 2009 elections approach, with more violent confrontations highly possible. End Comment.

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